

News Release

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**SURVEYORS CALL FOR INCREASE IN DEVELOPMENT DENSITIES**  
**- Chartered Surveyors Chief states at SCS National Annual Conference 2007 that**  
**New Housing Standards will Increase Costs**

One of the most controversial issues of the day ‘where next for development – where should developers build and how, especially in Dublin and other major urban centres’, was the theme of the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Society of Chartered Surveyors (SCS).

Increased development densities are vital otherwise the economics of residential development in city areas simply will not work, states the president of the Society of Chartered Surveyors **Felix McKenna**.

Speaking at the Society’s national annual conference in Dublin today (Thursday 8 November, Four Seasons Hotel, Ballsbridge), chartered building surveyor Felix McKenna called on planning authorities to relax densities in light of the new urban housing standards. (‘Sustainable urban housing: design standards’ published by Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government January, 2007 and adopted by Dublin City Council May, 2007).

“In practice, it is estimated that adherence to the guidelines could add as much as 20% to the cost of an average apartment or town house”, declared Mr. McKenna, “as by applying the current development plan site densities, the guidelines are likely to reduce the number of units permissible on a site by as much as 15%”.

The SCS president went on to state that that additional cost will not be reflected in increased selling prices in the current market, so the medium-term effect may well be an unexpected reduction in the number of apartments or townhouses completed in the city. “Not what we desire, as we seek to justify massive investment in public transport!” he declared.

*‘Where Next for Development? – Sustainable Land Use and Urban Development’* was the title of this year’s half-day annual conference of the Society of Chartered Surveyors, Ireland’s largest construction and property industry body, which explored the highly topical, complex, and even controversial, issues related to planning and investment in property, whether residential or commercial. It was opened by the Minister for the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, **John Gormley TD**.

Felix McKenna FSCS, FRICS, Barrister at Law, managing director of Osprey Property, the eircom property development company, and director of property services at eircom, advocates the adoption of “a more dense urban form, which supports investment in public infrastructure and public realm and a more sustainable form of land-use”.

He pointed out that commercial property development is faced with similar challenges as residential in meeting the sustainability agenda. “As corporate users seek to manage or reduce their carbon footprint and at the same time are increasingly conscious of long-term operating costs, developers are tasked with delivering more sustainable facilities. There is no doubt that such facilities have a higher initial development cost”.

He touched on rural development, saying that it too is challenged in sustainable terms. “While it is fashionable to be highly critical of one-off houses in rural Ireland, as someone born and reared in those parts, I don’t quite share that simplistic analysis”, argues the Monaghan man. “Vibrant rural communities require people, so the challenge is to find a planning model that strikes a balance between encouraging people to live in the countryside and respecting the toll on natural resources”.

The SCS president also called for acceleration to public transport projects, condemning the government for its tardiness in the huge delay of Transport 21 projects. Felix McKenna said that it was particularly regrettable that at a time when there was some capacity in the construction industry it wasn’t being utilised.

“It is imperative that the government accelerate the delivery of Transport 21 projects to meet the acknowledged infrastructure deficit, improve Ireland’s competitiveness and contribute to the sustainable development of urban land”, he declared, noting that while Ireland is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> on the world competitive economy scale, it is just 49<sup>th</sup> in infrastructure, 55<sup>th</sup> in railway infrastructure, 60<sup>th</sup> in roads and 64<sup>th</sup> in airports.

“That is a dreadful result after so many years of economic growth and budget surpluses. And that result is directly related to our planning decisions and land-use policies”, stated Felix McKenna before his audience of over 250 delegates.

He stressed the need for “a much more integrated approach to land-use policy, planning guidelines and public transportation”.

“And we must review development densities to support investment in public transport and deliver more sustainable mixed-use developments”, he urged, adding that the delay in the establishment of the Dublin Transport Authority “is most regrettable”.

The SCS conference examined the macro issues affecting development and land use, as well as analysing the impact of cost and valuation – issues such as whether or not are developers prepared to pay the costs involved in sustainable development; is there any premium in return, particularly with the current slowdown trend in the housing market, as well as where will they build, especially in Dublin and other major urban centres, and how.

The panel of speakers, comprising leading figures from the fields of planning, real estate, environment, quantity surveying and construction, included **John Tierney**, Dublin City Manager, who spoke on *‘A Vision for Dublin’* and **Conor Skehan**, head of Spatial Planning Department, DIT Bolton Street, who covered planning aspects in *‘Impact of National Spatial Strategy’*.

**Derry Scully**, managing partner, Bruce Shaw Partnership, looked at the financial aspects in his address on the *‘Impact of Sustainability on Cost’* as did **James Nugent**, director, Lisney, who discussed the economics of sustainable development in his paper on *‘Value Dimension’*. **John Forrester**, chairman of the London office agency department of DTZ, covered the impact of sustainability on commercial property in his paper entitled *‘Commercial Impact’*.

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**Note to Editors:** This is the eighth conference to be held by the Society of Chartered Surveyors, the largest body in Ireland representing both the construction and property industries. Dating back to 1895, it now has over 1,800 qualified Chartered Surveyors and a further 800 students and probationers countrywide. Members include quantity, planning & development, building, rural and other specialist surveyors, as well as general practice surveyors working in the valuation area.

